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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 001098

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR WHA A/S TOM SHANNON
DEPT FOR CUBA TRANSITION COORDINATOR CALEB MCCARRY
NSC FOR SENIOR ADVISOR DAN FISK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SP](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN/CUBA: DISTINCTIVE POLICY CAN LEAD TO
DISSIMILAR PERCEPTIONS

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Classified By: COM MICHAEL E. PARMLY FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: SPANISH AMBASSADOR TO HAVANA ALONSO ZALDIVAR TOLD US 21 NOVEMBER THE NEXT ROUND OF THE BILATERAL HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE WITH CUBA WOULD PROBABLY NOT OCCUR UNTIL EARLY 2008, WHICH HE ATTRIBUTED TO "SCHEDULING PROBLEMS." ALONSO EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT THE DROP IN POLITICAL PRISONERS ON THE ISLAND, WHICH HE ATTRIBUTED TO A FIRM GOC DECISION TO AVOID ARRESTING/CONVICTING DISSIDENTS. ALONSO ZALDIVAR COMMENTED ON "HEIGHTENED TENSION" WITHIN THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT AND NOMENKLATURA AT PRESENT. THE REASON, ACCORDING TO ALONSO: A WIDESPREAD AWARENESS OF THE NEED TO UNDERTAKE DEEP REFORMS -- ESPECIALLY IN THE ECONOMIC REALM -- COMBINED WITH UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHICH PATH TO TAKE. ALONSO CRITICIZED "THE LACK OF A UNIFIED OPPOSITION IN CUBA (SIC)," BUT REFUSED TO BLAME A TOTALITARIAN REGIME AS IN ANY WAY THE CAUSE. ALONSO SAID HE DOUBTED HE WOULD STAY IN HAVANA PAST THE 2008 SPANISH ELECTIONS, BUT EXPRESSED SATISFACTION AT HAVING SPENT THE LAST THREE-PLUS YEARS IN A DYNAMIC, CHANGING CUBA. THAT LAST POINT WAS ONE OF THE FEW AREAS WE FOUND OURSELVES IN AGREEMENT WITH ALONSO ZALDIVAR. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) FOR OVER THREE HOURS IN HIS OFFICE ON 21 NOVEMBER, SPANISH AMBASSADOR ALONSO ZALDIVAR REVIEWED WITH COM THE STATUS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE BETWEEN CUBA AND SPAIN, IN THE CONTEXT OF AN EXPANDING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. THE AMBASSADOR ADMITTED THAT THE TWO SIDES HAVE HAD TROUBLE FIXING A DATE FOR THE NEXT ROUND OF THE DIALOGUE, BUT ALONSO DENIED THAT THE DELAY WAS DUE TO ANY SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. "THE PROBLEM IS ONLY ONE OF DATES," THE SPANIARD INSISTED. THE PRESS OF OTHER BUSINESS, BOTH IN EUROPE AND IN CUBA, MEANT THAT THE TWO SIDES WOULD CERTAINLY NOT GET TOGETHER IN MADRID UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY 2008, AT THE EARLIEST.

¶3. (C) REVIEWING THE SUBSTANCE OF THE DIALOGUE, ALONSO DENIED THAT MADRID WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT TO DATE THERE HAD BEEN ALMOST NO FREEING OF LONG-TERM POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE AGREED THAT ONLY UPON COMPLETION OF PRISONERS TERMS WERE PEOPLE LEAVING JAILS. NONETHELESS, ALONSO ZALDIVAR WAS NOT DISCOURAGED. MADRID'S AIM ALL ALONG, HE INSISTED, WAS TO SEE

A DROP IN THE OVERALL NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE ASSERTED THAT UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN CUBA IN 2004, THERE HAD BEEN OVER 350 POLITICAL PRISONERS, WHEREAS NOW THERE ARE "ONLY 250." MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE CONTINUED, THE REGIME HAS AVOIDED CONVICTING ANY NEW POLITICAL PRISONERS IN HIS TIME HERE. AGREEING THAT THE GOAL SHOULD BE FOR THERE TO BE NO PERSON IN CUBAN JAILS FOR HIS/HER POLITICAL BELIEFS, ALONSO ZALDIVAR VOICED CONFIDENCE THAT THE STATUS QUO OF GRADUAL RELEASE WITH NO NEW CONVICTIONS WOULD BE SUSTAINED OVER THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. THE SPANISH-CUBAN DIALOGUE WAS AIMED, IN PART, TO ENCOURAGE THAT TREND.

¶4. (C) SEEKING TO POINT TO OTHER "VICTORIES" PRODUCED BY THE BILATERAL DIALOGUE, ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID THE CUBAN WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW THE VISIT OF SWISS CITIZEN/ UN HUMAN RIGHTS RAPPORTEUR (FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD) JEAN ZEIGLER IN EARLY NOVEMBER SHOWED CUBAN OPENNESS TO UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS. (COMMENT: ZEIGLER, A LONG-TIME REGIME APOLOGIST NOTORIOUS EVEN IN HIS NATIVE SWITZERLAND FOR HIS RADICAL VIEWS, IS PREPARING A REPORT ON FOOD, BUT HAS ALREADY HEAPED LAVISH HELPINGS OF PRAISE ON THE REGIME IN A WIDE VARIETY OF AREAS, FOOD AND BEYOND. ALMOST ALL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS ON THE ISLAND HAVE PUBLICLY REJECTED HIS VISIT, NOTING, INTER ALIA, ZEIGLER'S FAILURE TO TALK TO ANY OF THEM.) ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID CONFIDENTLY THAT THERE WOULD BE OTHER UN RAPPORTEURS' VISITS IN 2008, WHICH HE TOOK AS A FURTHER SIGN OF THE REGIME OPENING UP. HE POINTED TO THE CUBAN AUTHORITIES' AVOIDANCE OF THE DEATH SENTENCE FOR THREE ATTEMPTED HIJACKERS AS ANOTHER SIGN OF EVOLVING REGIME ATTITUDES ON HUMAN RIGHTS. FINALLY, HE PRAISED THE HOLDING OF LEGISLATIVE, PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS LATE THIS YEAR AND EARLY NEXT AS ANOTHER SIGN OF CUBAN EVOLUTION. (COMMENT: WE EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT ALONSO ZALDIVAR'S PRAISE OF THE ELECTIONS, BUT THE SPANIARD WAVED OFF OUR REMARK.) IN SHORT, MADRID SEES A CLEAR UPWARD TREND IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AREA, AND HOPES TO ENCOURAGE IT WITH CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT.

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¶5. (C) ONE ROOT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM IN CUBA, THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR ASSERTED, WAS THE LACK OF A UNIFIED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT. DISSIDENTS ARE NOT NUMEROUS AND ENGAGE AS MUCH IN INFIGHTING AS THEY DO IN CONFRONTING THE REGIME. ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID THAT COMMON STANCES WOULD BETTER ENABLE THE OPPOSITION TO FACE THE REGIME. HE SIDE-STEPPED ANY ATTEMPT TO ATTRIBUTE THE OPPOSITION'S SITUATION TO THE PRESSURE THEY FACE FROM THE REGIME, NOT DENYING IT CATEGORICALLY BUT MINIMIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCH REGIME BEHAVIOR. (COMMENT: DISCUSSION OF THIS ISSUE WAS THE ONLY POINT AT WHICH COM'S DISCUSSION WITH ALONSO ZALDIVAR GOT HEATED. COM ASSERTED THAT ON THE CONTRARY, IN THE PAST YEAR, HE HAD SEEN A REAL EXPANSION, IN NUMBERS AND IN COMPLEXITY, OF CUBANS SPEAKING UP ON THEIR OWN BEHALF. ALONSO ZALDIVAR DIDN'T REBUT THE POINT SPECIFICALLY; HE JUST MADE CLEAR HE DISAGREED.)

¶6. (C) THE REGIME IS NOT SOFTENING ITS STANCE OVERALL, ALONSO ZALDIVAR ADMITTED. THERE CONTINUES TO BE AN IMPASSE IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC POLICY. MOST AT THE TOP OF THE REGIME RECOGNIZE THE WIDESPREAD POPULAR DISSATISFACTION WITH LIVING CONDITIONS, HE CONCEDED. THE PROBLEM IS THE BLOCKAGE BY HARD-LINE ELEMENTS OF ANY SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION STEPS. ALONSO ZALDIVAR DID NOT WANT TO LAY ALL THE RESISTENCE AT THE FOOT OF AILING DICTATOR FIDEL CASTRO. INSTEAD, HE POINTED TO YEARS OF WIDESPREAD ENGRAINED COMMITMENT TO STATE-RUN AND CENTRALIZING POLICIES BY A WHOLE CADRE OF REGIME OFFICIALS, ECONOMISTS AND ADMINISTRATORS. HE REJECTED ANY IDEA THAT THOSE ELEMENTS WERE SIMPLY PROTECTING THEIR OWN PERSONAL INTERESTS. "NO; THEY REALLY BELIEVE," THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR INSISTED. HE DESCRIBED A DAY-LONG MEETING HE HAD RECENTLY HAD WITH SUCH OFFICIALS, WHERE HE SAID THAT LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESSES WERE MET WITH SKEPTICISM BY HIS AUDIENCE. HE AGAIN CAUTIONED AGAINST ATTRIBUTING ALL RESISTENCE TO REFORM TO FIDEL HIMSELF, AND WARNED THAT EVEN WHEN FIDEL FINALLY DIES, THERE WILL STILL BE ELEMENTS WHO WANT TO CLING TO A TOTALLY

STATE-AND PARTY-CONTROLLED ECONOMY AND SOCIETY. (COMMENT: ALONSO ZALDIVAR CHOSE NOT TO NAME THOSE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS. OTHER DIPLOMATIC AND CUBAN OBSERVERS GENERALLY POINT TO SUCH FIGURES AS COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER RAMIRO VALDEZ, HEALTH MINISTER JOSE RAMON BALAGUER AND COUNCIL OF STATE MEMBER JOSE RAMON MACHADO AS THREE WHO CARRY THE TORCH FOR ORTHODOXY WITHIN THE TOP RULING CIRCLES.)

17. (C) ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID THAT THE PROLONGED PERIOD OF WAITING FOR ECONOMIC REFORM MEASURES -- HINTED AT SO CLEARLY, HE SAID, IN RAUL'S JULY 26 SPEECH -- HAD GENERATED REAL TENSIONS WITHIN THE TOP RULING CIRCLE AND, MORE GENERALLY, THROUGHOUT THE NOMENKLATURA. ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID HE COULD NOT PUT HIS FINGER ON THE SPECIFIC CAUSE, BUT THERE IS "A REAL NERVOUSNESS AT THE TOP" AND AT LEVELS JUST BELOW THAT. COM NOTED THAT THE FRENETHIC BEHAVIOR OF VENEZUELAN LEADER HUGO CHAVEZ, AND THE LATTER'S CONSTANT RHETORICAL REFERENCES AND VISITS TO HAVANA, KEPT PEOPLE OFF BALANCE, AND THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR AGREED. CHAVEZ IS NOT POPULAR AT ANY LEVEL OF CUBAN SOCIETY, ALONSO ZALDIVAR OPINED, BUT VENEZUELAN INTERESTS HAVE BECOME TOO IMPORTANT TO CUBA TO BE ABLE TO IGNORE THE NEIGHBOR. BEYOND CHAVEZ, HOWEVER, THE CONTINUING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE REGIME ARE CLEARLY FELT BY CUBANS AT ALL LEVELS, AND THAT IN ITSELF GENERATES TENSIONS.

18. (C) COMMENT: THIS WAS OUR FIRST EXTENDED DISCUSSION WITH ALONSO ZALDIVAR IN SOME TIME, AND WE WILL KEEP UP THE CONTACT, BUT IT WILL NOT BE EASY. ALONSO ZALDIVAR SAID HE WOULD CERTAINLY LEAVE HAVANA IN THE SPRING IF THE RULING SOCIALISTS LOST THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS, BUT EVEN IF ZAPATERO WAS RETURNED TO OFFICE, HE THOUGHT HE HAD DONE WHAT HE HAD SET OUT TO DO. WE FOUND HIM LESS CONCERNED WITH SHOWING EU SOLIDARITY AND MORE FRANK IN OFFERING EXPLANATIONS AND ANALYSES THAT PUT THE REGIME IN A SYMPATHETIC LIGHT. WE HAD HERETOFORE FOUND ALONSO ZALDIVAR TO BE ONE OF THE MORE KEEN OBSERVERS OF THE CUBAN SCENE, EVEN WITH HIS ADMITTED BIASES, BUT ON THIS OCCASION, MUCH OF HIS PREVIOUS PERSPICACITY WAS LACKING. ALONSO ZALDIVAR HAS CLEARLY BOUGHT INTO THE REGIME LINE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY ISSUES, AND TO THE EXTENT HE CAN, IS PUSHING HIS EU COLLEAGUES IN THAT DIRECTION.

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PARMLY